

*Max Stirner's  
Political Spectrography*



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# INTRODUCTION *with* SPECTRAL THESES

*Alejandro de Acosta*

## 1

My motivation for translating Fabián Ludueña's "Stirner's Political Spectrography" is double. It offers an introduction and situation of the man and his work, drawing the attention of beginners to some remarkable moments in *The Unique and its Property*, especially in relation to its actual or probable influence.<sup>1</sup> The article also articulates a perspective that has not been part of recent discussions

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<sup>1</sup> The article first appeared in 2012 as part of a collection of essays on Post-Hegelian philosophy by multiple authors published in Argentina. Ludueña's is the entry on Stirner in this examination of philosophers writing and thinking in the wake of Hegel. Also included are Marx, Nietzsche, Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Cousin, Kojève, Bataille, and Girard.

on Stirner, which I hereby transmit to would-be Stirnerians as a challenge.

To prepare the transmission of the challenge, however, I must say something about the reception of Stirner—at least how I see the most recent wave of interest in him in the North American context. There is an air of undisputed, unacknowledged repetition about this wave. It is good indeed to have rediscovered Stirner and for some to learn his lesson again. *The Unique and its Property* is one of those books one might reacquaint oneself with now and then. But there is something strange about the way some make continued reference to a book published in 1844 as though it had gone the farthest down some imagined, progressive line of demythologization—as though no effort in philosophy or theory, in whatever life or afterlife has given form to them since the mid-nineteenth century, could conceivably have added anything of import. Not to speak of political or artistic practice! The egoists and individualists of the early twentieth century were justified in placing their voices in continuity with the voice that speaks in *The Unique*, living as they were in some nineteenth century that refused to end. Today, however, after decade upon decade of historical decomposition, believing what *The Unique* seems to say about itself is entirely too credulous of an approach. It is understandable when a Marxist references Marx in this way, or when a certain sort of academic cites the historical figure they specialize

in every time they speak or write.<sup>2</sup> It is true that, without *The Unique and its Property*, contemporary theory, critical and otherwise, would have a different form. But Stirner is neither theory's ultimate progenitor nor its *a priori* summation. He may have perfected a certain form, but, rather than getting caught up in the form's self-presentation (the book's monologue, basically), contemporary readers should ask whether we are capable of inhabiting—not to speak of whether we *want*—that form at all. Therefore, my approach begins with a prefatory historical question to inflect or qualify any enthusiasm some (we) might feel for a book as shrill as *The Unique and its Property*. If we ask: how did Stirner come to earn this strange status for a few?, it makes more sense to answer by asking another question, to wit: why was it *a few*?—why did Stirner *not* become a Hegel or a Marx, let alone a Nietzsche or a Freud? Rephrased, then, the question becomes: why was the book forgotten, virtually buried?—and it might initially find a trivial answer, along the lines: *because S. was right... S. went the farthest... S. was the most radical, the most extreme... S., greatest criminal...* coupled with an explicit or implicit *... and everyone else was wrong*. But speaking from this perspective, though enjoyably hyperbolic for some, is overly facile, assuming both that Stirner perfected a form and that we seek the same perfection in

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2 E.g. Heideggerians, Lacanians, Deleuzians ...



the same form.<sup>3</sup> I.e., would-be Stirnerians: that is why you like him, not why the book was forgotten.

A better question is the one Ludueña allows us to formulate: how and why did Stirner secretly influence all of modern thought? Whatever weight we grant each of the various connections made in this short article, as a set they are its first great provocation and the vector for the rest. That Stirner, or at least his book, was there, secretly, in

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- 3 Those who focus solely on Stirner or his avatars (certain egoists, for example), trying to revive or repeat him, seem to end up making him into a great anti-philosopher, a figure that modern philosophy severally repeats, that of the great philosopher who ends philosophy by solving all its problems once and for all (usually birthing some form of “theory”; again, Marx is the exemplar here). Every question is treated as answerable through consultation of or commentary on his book. Where have we heard this before? One arrives at such a conclusion through a poor understanding of what was at work in the history of philosophy (hint: *not* merely ideology—and thus what kills philosophy is *not* perfecting its critique). Such a view not only botches what there is to do in reading *The Unique*, but renders our understanding of what philosophy was, and what effects it might still have, confused. (I think a little sadly of how many “confessed egoists” will never read, let alone begin to understand, what is great and noble in Spinoza...) Indeed, one way to construct theory, especially “low” theory, as opposed to philosophy, is to isolate a philosopher from the historical developments (or becomings, ‘turns’ of the sort our academic contemporaries are interminably trying to replicate) of philosophy, which often equates to taking seriously a claim to have done with philosophy (and thus its becoming). See the final section.

Nietzsche, in Heidegger, in Foucault, and so on, is a tantalizing thought because it prompts contemporaries to read more widely, and with more sophistication: rather than clinging to the purity of one book, one thinker, his avatars, we swim out into the sea of impure versions, bad copies, echoes, reiterations... maybe never to return. Stirner's afterlife is more interesting than Stirner himself; and *The Unique's* secret afterlife, as outlined by F.L., is of greater import than *The Unique* itself could ever be.

One could add a corollary question: can Stirner's book explain its own composition and publication, and aftermath? Could we, from within the approach set out in *The Unique*, explain both how *The Unique* came to be, and how the Unique (supposing it exists outside the book) comes to be? More importantly, can we, from within that approach, explain the book's own decomposition—its burial, all the misinterpretations its supporters are busy indicating, its variegated reiterations and echoes in more recent authors? My answer, provisionally, is yes—but not without confessing to parody, and perhaps ruining the fun of the parodic bits for some. To understand the book's aftermath, in any case, we will have to follow Ludueña in a reading of Stirner that focuses on aspects that are rarely, if at all, discussed, at least in the recent North American context. This reading, whose register F.L. would not hesitate

to qualify as metaphysical, focuses on the status of the spectral in *The Unique and its Property*.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Textual literalists (who have chosen a peculiar text to be literalists about!) will immediately seek to correct Ludueña and I here, reminding that the specters don't exist, perhaps gesturing towards something like a nominalism on Stirner's part. For my part, I would reply, that even when remaining at a surface, more or less literalist reading (taking Stirner's seriousness and his parody equally seriously, as some do), depending on the ghost, phantasm, or specter in question, Stirner seems to inconsistently 1) deny its existence altogether 2) suggest it's a hallucination or psychic distortion 3) grant it some sort of existence but deny its importance to him *qua* Unique. An interpretation more interested in the *use* of *The Unique* (Stirner did suggest, after all, that his readers do what they like with it) would enlarge the scope covered by the third point above, noting that what matters is one's relation to whatever is designated as spectral, more than its ultimate ontological status.

The question of the status of the spectral is really two questions: the question of specters (ghosts, phantasms) in their insistence and their persistence.

*Insistence.* Ludueña writes: “there is a kind of coincidence between phylogenesis and ontogenesis on the plane of the spectrography of the becoming-human of *Homo*.” He is referring, I believe, primarily to section I of Part I of *The Unique and its Property*, “A Human Life.” Coming as it does before section II (“Men of the Old Time and the New”—structured as a chronological historical narrative leading from antiquity to modern times), this short section may be read both at a surface level as an account of how I (*qua* anyone, any proto-Unique) grew up and came to have my first own thoughts, or, at a deeper level, as a more or less intentional gesture towards a prehistoric anthropogenic moment. In this section we may find confirmation of Ludueña’s claim, “humanity’s infancy coincides with its primordial confrontation with the specter”, and this insight may be fruitfully read forward into the rest of *The Unique*.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Two further observations about the entailments of the anthropogenic nature of the prehistoric break with the specters: *first*, if some hominid makes the transition to thinking/being human in its break (all at once or over thousands of years) with the

There are two claims here, either being deduced from or added to (in a supplemental, non-contradictory manner) Stirner. First, that the specters were there, insistent, at the outset, in prehistory, just as they reliably insist ‘there’ at the outset for anyone making the transition to confessed uniqueness; their *insistence* precedes human *existence*, and for a singular human existence to be fully realized as uniqueness, each singularity must engage in “the combat of self-assertion” (that this is a rare event, and probably impossible to succeed at, are both besides the point). The second claim is that the combat with the specters, which usually involves separating oneself from them, exorcising them, diminishing their power, attempting to expel them and so on, may alter the manner and degree of their insistence, but in no way finally dispels them.

*Persistence.* This latter claim is why I say that specters *persist* as well as insist. They return, they are (most are, many are) true *revenants* in this sense. And this means that the founding anthropogenic act, the phylogenetic drama, is constantly being repeated in the ontogenic drama. This

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specters over it, then this break must leave both the concept of animal in its wake, and some conjoint concept of spirit: animal spirits, animals with spirits, animals as spirits—and also animals and spirits ‘as such’. *Second:* though Stirner accounts for the break as the result of a shift in thinking, I think the break must also have required a technique, a proto-technology, a proto-art, an originally accidental, later experimental, invention and design of a spiritual machine-for-breaking with: a *separator*.)

is the datum, the conclusion we should bring with us as we re-read Stirner's abbreviated (parodic-Hegelian) history of the West. Or just make up your own: watch the specters be cathartically confronted in epic and tragedy, and return as archetypes; watch them be rationally excised in philosophy, and return as Ideas, haunting systems. Observe their management in theology and then note the 'Stirnerian' moments in the mystics. And so on. Cultural transmission amplifies and distorts, but above all repeats, the anthropogenic process.

We will be less confused about how to evaluate *The Unique* if we keep this process in mind. We will not judge the ancients or the moderns so harshly, perhaps, if we are aware that the persistence of the specters is some sort of factum irreducible to a collective and transhistorical series of human mistakes: in a crude Hegelian sense, failures at freedom, desires for freedom that were too early or on the part of the wrong peoples. Of course, Stirner the Hegelian (malgré lui) replaces the arrival of freedom at the end of history with the most exaggerated, complete and final, event of breaking-with (his own, documented in the book, with the implicit message being that the good news be spread far and wide, to bring about the true end of history, as F.L. suggests). In sum, *The Unique* paradoxically asserts the break as the originarily anthropogenic event while compounding the impossibility of finally having broken, because it also makes clear that the specters

insisted at the beginning and persist thereafter. That is how, I suppose, Stirner would explain the book's appearance (as the highest iteration of the anthropogenic event, revealing the Unique behind God and Man as the ultimate realized form of human animality) and its forgetting (the specters return and cloud things over for the next generation, unless, somehow, the phantasmicide or exorcism is globally successful, and the other miserable alternative, the permanent war of egoists, may begin—but this seems even more mythical than ghosts, demons and their ilk).

Now we may offer our own answer as to why *The Unique* was buried and forgotten for so long. In its extremity it positioned itself in an almost unthinkable, para-philosophical position (attempting to write out a moment in our lives, or in the distant past, that is forgotten: neither can be remembered; each must be speculatively reconstructed). It tries to stage the event of breaking with the specters exemplarily, non-generically, non-specifically, but also finally. And then? Not much happened. To answer Ludueña's final rhetorical question: the specters return, they recover a voice. And the few people who came in touch with the book were thereby hard pressed to recognize it for what it was, that is to say, to recognize something of themselves or their history, in it. Does this suggest their collusion with specters? Yes, probably, but that's not all that important. What is important is that, like the anthropogenic process, the book, now buried and forgotten,

could be rediscovered, and some of its operations could be silently, indirectly repeated. That is the story Ludueña summarizes in the case of Nietzsche, or plausibly hints at in that of Heidegger...

All of which suggests that *The Unique* should be read as much, or more, as symptom or effect than as cure or cause. Of course a first reading will allow some to bid goodbye (temporarily, at least) to some weak specters. It is exciting to feel one might repeat what the book claims it's accomplished. But the *The Unique's* true importance will come later if at all, when one realizes that it underlines, really hysterically remarks, on the insistence or persistence of the stronger, more powerful revenants (after which Stirner never ceases to model the I that speaks in his text: their drive, after all, is to be manifest, to assert themselves; their cause is effortlessly their own).

If we focus on the book's secret afterlife, we are faced with a scenario F.L. suggests begins with Stirner and unfolds from there. All history has been the history of the human entanglement with specters (history in some sense is spectrography), and in a strong sense we can't conceive of another kind of human history once the break with the spectral has been deduced as anthropogenic. Following some remarks Ludueña makes in the Overture to his Lovecraft book, the historical time including and following Stirner is no longer a story or history of philosophy, since authentic philosophy ended when the last schools



closed their doors; what we have now are hybrid intellectual forms.<sup>6</sup> Putting these two together, we must be living in the phase of the strange afterlife of philosophy, and the return of the specters (their evasion of the Enlightenment and the critique of ideology, with Stirner as (why not?) its most radical moment). Where does this leave us? Of what calls itself “contemporary political philosophy” Ludueña writes that it “seems to have forgotten its genealogical roots in a post-Hegelianism of which it merely offers new spectral incarnations.” This is the import of the profound reading of Stirner to which Ludueña invites us: rather than reading back from recent or contemporary thought to Stirner, when we try to understand what is Stirnerian here and there, maybe everywhere, in contemporary thought

- 6 Ludueña elliptically describes a much weirder death for philosophy than its happy conclusion at the hands of a final Master (or the most insubordinate disciple): “In all truth, philosophers are already extinct from the face of the earth. [...] The death of the last philosopher happened many centuries ago. I will not proceed here to a useless list of dates and names. I will simply say that philosophers actually ceased to exist when the schools that made them possible disappeared. The effacement of philosophers is not equivalent, however, to the end of philosophy. [...] Philosophy as *theoria* has found singularities in which to incarnate itself across the many centuries of human history. However, there is no authentic philosophy without schools, without transmissibility, without an *ethos* that nourishes *theoria* and also allows access to it. In all, philosophy can quite well figure out how to inject itself into different kinds of theorists ...” (*H.P. Lovecraft: The Disjunction in Being*, 8-9).

(how it is entangled with specters that it nevertheless vows to dispel), we are trying see if there is some other theoretical move to make, forward rather than backwards.

Somewhat apart from the preceding, I conclude by suggesting that *The Unique and its Property* may be recognized as an early example of *low theory*. I found this term in McKenzie Wark's writings on the Situationists (he seems to have found it in Jack Halberstam's book on failure). As I now deploy the phrase, it means some of the following:

1. Despite its stated positions, *The Unique* is in part, and inadvertently, a work of popularization, a mediator between a highly technical, abstract form of philosophy or theory (in Stirner's case, Hegel) and more popular forms suitable for pamphlets or newspaper articles (old versions), zines and writing on the Great Web (new versions). Many have inadvertently absorbed bits of the account of alienation in Hegel or found insights they might also have discovered in Marx or Feuerbach, even Kant, in Stirner—because he was or seemed more approachable, or at least because reading him and not the rest was vetted in their milieus. It is not coincidental that, as Peter Sloterdijk points out, that Stirner was not a professor, but a freelance writer who contributed to newspapers and reviews.

2. *The Unique and its Property* as low theory also means that it did not need to be superbly written to have its effects. It is written well enough, and its mode of transmission is made easy by its writerly mission, which is to parody and mock rather than invent and propose. In its unflagging negativity it is, as Santayana said, “rather tiresome”, and there is much to meditate on in this imbalance between the quality of the writing and the power or usefulness of the ideas that it transmits. For example, Stirner gets many of his effects by parodying Hegel. I would never suggest that *The Unique* is only a parody—but I would say that much of what is enjoyable (and also much of what is tiresome) in the book is the parody element. To take the book at face value, as befalls an unfortunate now and then, ends up meaning being pro-parody, not as parody, but pro-(parody-of-)Hegel or pro-(parody-of-)Feuerbach (to take just the two most obvious examples), mistaking the extremity of the parody for the much-sought-after extremity as such.
3. Putting these two points together, we see that, like other works of low theory, it does not so much *communicate* an argument or complex theoretical position as it *transmits* a certain basic set of theoretical operations with their attendant vocabulary (despite some vagaries of translation), along with the appropriate

affective charge requisite for uptake and circulation in other spaces where forms of life are being invented, modified, or reproduced, meaning: hybridization with various political, anti-political, and subcultural modes. This transmission is capable of existing in a relatively pure form as well as many impure ones. To each form corresponds one or more spaces and milieus, as small as a group of friends and as large as a movement. That *The Unique* has enough uptake in Anglophony for Ludueña's piece to be translated with some expectation of an audience<sup>7</sup> is just as much an effect of a space of publication and discussion that sought it out as a resource, i.e. created itself in response to it, as it is of any purported importance of the work (which is why we often find so much low theory focused on thinkers who turn out to be secondary with regard to the main issues at stake in the lives of their readers, printers, translators, commentators, etc.). And I note with interest that these phenomena stand almost entirely apart from the weird afterlife of *The Unique* narrated by Ludueña.

4. From a similar perspective and intention, we might look around and ask where else spectrography is

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7 The audience this pamphlet anticipates. The article on Stirner will also reappear as one of two appendices to a forthcoming translation of Ludueña's book *Beyond the Anthropic Principle: Towards a Philosophy of the Outside*.

happening, and in what other forms. I would point out that certain recent discussions on magic, animism, and the spectral, especially those connected to a renewed interest in Lovecraft in realist modes, though they are clearly something other than the latest Stirnerian filiation,<sup>8</sup> unfold in marginal spaces (academic, para-academic, non- or anti-academic) not always distant from the haunts of those reading and discussing Stirner today. They might be fruitfully brought into dialogue with Stirner as F.L. interprets him, less interested in Stirner than in spectrography, since their participants may accept (though re-interpreting) the following theses (only the last of which is political in the usual sense of the word):

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8 See, for example, Quentin Meillassoux's "Spectral Dilemma" in *Collapse IV* and Reza Negarestani's online response, "Instrumental Spectrality and Meillassoux's Catoptric Controversies". Here the specters are narrowly construed as the human dead, after their deaths.

1.

Whatever they are, specters precede us.

2.

What we are, we come to be in relation to them.  
This relation may take the form of a separation.

3.

The separation may pass, temporarily,  
between us and the specters.  
Or it may pass into us.

4.

When the separation has passed  
between us and the specters, it will eventually  
be cancelled, i.e. the specters will return.

5.

The separation that has passed into us  
may also, eventually, be cancelled.

# Max Stirner's Political Spectrography



Fabián Ludueña

## 1

In 1874, Adolf Baumgartner, then a student in Basel, checked out a disquieting, little-read book from the University library—so little read that it had only been requested two years earlier by *privatdozent* Schwarzkopf (Syrus Archimedes) and would not be requested again until five years later, in 1879, by professor Hans Heussler.

The title of the book was *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (*The Unique and its Property*); it had been published in 1844 by the daring Leipzig publisher Otto Wigand, who



already had Arnold Ruge, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Lorenz von Stein in his select catalog of radical writers. Its author: Max Stirner (pseudonym of Johann Caspar Schmidt, little-known girls' high school teacher and sometime member of the "Free" group in Berlin), who quit his teaching post soon after the book's publication, only to fall increasingly into economic ruin, divorce (initiated by his wife), debts, prison, poverty, and finally, death, from an infected boil, on June 25, 1856.

An "infamous life" that would have dissipated in the whirlpool of time and oblivion had it not been for the intervention of secret readers, heavy-handed censors, and exalted apologists<sup>1</sup> who materialized along with his work (even as Stirner languished in the abysses of social despair to which the world had irreparably condemned him). Immediately upon its publication, the book was seized by the authorities of the *Königlich-Sächsische Kreis-Direktion* under the pretense that

in certain passages in this writing, not only are God, Christ, the Church and religion in general the object of the most disrespectful blasphemy, but the entire social order as well—State and Government are defined as something that should no longer exist,

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<sup>1</sup> Among whom John Henry Mackay, with his work *Max Stirner 1806-1856. Sein Leben und sein Werk*, is especially worth mentioning.

while lying, perjury, murder and suicide are justified, and the right to property is denied.<sup>2</sup>

After debates between Ministers von Falkenstein and von Armin, the book was definitively confiscated by the Prussian Superior Censorship Council on August 26, 1845. Despite all that, it circulated beyond Prussia and came into the Basel library, and into the hands of young Baumgartner.

Why did this severe university student become interested in such a book, and how did he come to know of it at all? Adolf Baumgartner was not just another student; he was Friedrich Nietzsche's favorite, his *Erzschüler*, as the philosopher liked to call him, the one who would take on the French translation of his teacher's *Untimely Meditations*. On the recommendation of his mentor, Baumgartner borrowed Stirner's book from the university library. The reason could not have been more persuasive: Nietzsche had told him that Stirner's thought was the most daring since Hobbes.

Now, how could Nietzsche himself have come to know Stirner's work? No doubt Nietzsche would have run across the name in the book *Philosophie des Unbewußten* by Edward von Hartmann<sup>3</sup>, which he subjects to a critical demolition in the second *Untimely Meditation*. There,

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<sup>2</sup> Roberto Calasso, "Accompagnamento alla lettura di Stirner", 374.

<sup>3</sup> See Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, and Fischer, *Hartmann's Philosophie des Unbewußten*.

the thinker writes that Hartmann's is a "philosophical joke" (*Spaß-Philosophie*) whose author is "one of the first philosophical parodists of all time" (*einen der ersten philosophischen Parodisten aller Zeiten*).<sup>4</sup> Though Hartmann makes great use of Stirner to define the third of the periods in his proposal about a historical evolution of humanity leading to individualism, Nietzsche nowhere mentions the latter in his critique of Hartmann. This silence concerning Stirner's work would pervade all of Nietzsche's writings, public as well as private.<sup>5</sup>

Another possibility: Nietzsche's knowledge of Stirner came through the very brief mention made of him in a work he greatly admired, Friedrich Lange's *History of Materialism*, where it is written that Stirner destroys every "moral idea" (*sittliche Idee*), only to immediately set him aside as not having "had so much influence that we need linger with him."<sup>6</sup> However, everything suggests that Nietzsche disobeyed Lange's prohibition and secretly, decisively took Stirner on to such an extent that he came to declare

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4 *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, 268; *On the Utility and Liability of History for Life*, 148.

5 As is also the case with many of his interpreters. A paradigmatic case is that of Charles Andler, who, having dedicated an entire volume of his monumental intellectual biography of Nietzsche to the problem of sources, does not even mention Stirner's name among the thinkers who forged the thinking of the former. See his *Nietzsche, sa vie et sa pensée*, vol. 1.

6 Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, Buch 2, 81; *History of Materialism*, vol. 2, 256.

to Ida Overbeck that, if his silent link to the author of *The Unique* were to be discovered, posterity would be able to wield a clear accusation of plagiarism against him.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, from Nietzsche<sup>8</sup> to Heidegger, passing through Marx and all the great thinkers of post-Hegelianism, Stirner's subterranean and above all hidden influence has left a determining footprint in the foundations and development of contemporary philosophy. Very well: beyond the multiple readings and unconfessed borrowings to which his work was subjected (and which there is no space to reconstruct here), what are some of the intolerable secrets hidden in *The Unique and its Property*?

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7 The testimony about this is to be found in Carl Bernoulli Albrecht's *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche. Eine Freundschaft*, 238-239.

8 In Nietzsche's case, see Albert Lévy, *Stirner et Nietzsche*, and more recently, Thomas H. Brobjer, "A Possible Solution to the Stirner-Nietzsche Question."

Karl Löwith was one of the first contemporary philosophers to unequivocally state that Stirner's work is "a final logical consequence of Hegel's historical construction (*aus Hegels weltgeschichtlicher Konstruktion*)."<sup>9</sup> But it is equally certain that Stirner takes a decisive distance from many of the central postulates of the thinker from Heidelberg, for whom the I constitutes "the transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to differentiation (*das Übergehen aus unterschiedsloser Unbestimmtheit zur Unterscheidung*)" as elimination of the initial "abstract negativity" (*abstrakten Negativität*).<sup>10</sup> The Hegelian system aspires, on the other hand, to a specifically universal will, since in it "all restriction and all particular individuality (*alle Beschränkung und besondere Einzelheit*) have been superseded (*aufgehoben*)."<sup>11</sup>

That is why the concept is constituted not as exclusive individuality, but as "universality and cognition" (*Allgemeinheit und Erkennen*) that "in its other has *its own* objectivity for its object."<sup>12</sup> In fact, what for Hegel is a point of

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9 Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, 134. See also Lawrence Stepelevich, "Max Stirner as Hegelian".

10 Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, 52; *Philosophy of Right*, 30.

11 *Ibid.*, 75; 43.

12 Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, 549; *Science of Logic*, 824.

departure, that is, the self-determination of the I which will later be raised beyond the determinations belonging to finitude towards the infinite and divine<sup>13</sup>—is for Stirner, on the contrary, the foundation of his system; in it, the self-determination of the I is the only possible absolute, with no transcendence existing beyond its finitude.

Thusly seen, Stirner lays the foundation for a heretical Hegelianism that posits a non-teleological philosophy of history. Hegel's thinking is certainly the condition of possibility for the Stirnerian idea-system,<sup>14</sup> but it's equally certain that the path of the *Unique* leads to the most radical rejection of Hegel's Spirit. In this sense we can maintain that Stirner was the seed sowed by Hegelianism for its own self-destruction (or, perhaps, for the final, unexpected, paradoxical post-speculative metamorphosis).

Stirner places his ideas atop a delicate edifice: an *Ur-geschichte* of *Homo sapiens*, hailing back to times impossible to date with chronological precision—the times of the origin of man's opening to the world. Nature's primordial space is, according to Stirner, home to the ominous powers of the specter. At the same time, as specter (*Gespenst*) and spirit (*Geist*) are perfectly synonymous, it

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13 For an interesting discussion on this point, see Robert Wallace, *Hegel's Philosophy of Reality, Freedom, and God*, 5-9.

14 Which Stirner himself never ceases to mention in his writing against Bruno Bauer, the "Rixdorf eremite." See "Ueber B. Bauer's Posaune des juengsten Gerichts" ("On Bruno Bauer's *Trumpet of Last Judgement*").

becomes possible to maintain that the first act constitutive of the human is “the first ‘profanation’ of the divine (*Entgötterung des Göttlichen*), that is, of the uncanny (*des Unheimlichen*), the spectral (*des Spuks*), of the ‘superior powers’ (*oberen Mächte*).”<sup>15</sup> The process of hominization coincides, then, not so much with the negation of the specter but rather with its incorporation in the human world, its transfer from a purely natural and exterior sphere towards the space domesticated and delineated by human forms of life. The first properly anthropotechnic gesture of the human species has been to consider that “the world is thus discredited, for we are above it, we are spirit (*Geist*).”<sup>16</sup>

That is why there is a kind of coincidence between phylogenesis and ontogenesis on the plane of the spectrography of the becoming-human of *Homo*. As we will also see, it is not exaggerated to maintain that modern humanism is the superior phase of a specifically spectral anthropoiesis. For Stirner, humanity’s infancy coincides with its primordial confrontation with the specter, and the resulting rejection of the world that constitutes the motor of the historical unfolding of the Greek civilizational milieu: “for the ancients the world was a truth (*eine Wahrheit*)” though, on the other hand, “they worked toward the conquest of the world (*Weltüberwindung*).”<sup>17</sup> As

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15 Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 26 (14). [See translator’s note.]

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*, 38-39 (27).

Stirner indicates, “the great work of the ancients: for the human to know itself as a being without relations, and without a world (*beziehungs- und weltloses Wesen*), to know itself as *spirit* (*Geist*).”<sup>18</sup>

That is to say that the slow work of classical philosophy will be to carve the stamp of reason, and, to use it to mark the path that leads to the spiritual contents of thought. Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics will likewise center the *good life* as philosophy’s desideratum: “What is antiquity seeking, then? The true *enjoyment of life* (*Lebensgenuß*)! You will find that at bottom it is all the same as ‘the true life’ (*wahre Leben*) [...] They are seeking for the cheerful, unclouded *life-courage*.”<sup>19</sup> In contrast with a good part of contemporary philosophy, Stirner did not in the least praise the virtues of the *bios philosophikos*. For him, these were anachronistic and dangerous. Quite the opposite: from the very beginning, the primordial attention to life on the part of thought conceived as spirit (reason) distanced humans from the world, preparing the ascent to the superior forms of spiritual ascesis.

The road that, through the *logos*, leads from *bios* to *aletheia* as imperfect forms of domestication of nature’s original spectrality, opens the doors that will lead to Christianity as a representative mode of life of humanity’s youth, in which language, life, and truth are fused together

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18 *Ibid.*, 34 (22).

19 *Ibid.*, 36-37 (25).



in the empire of law. The Christian's *ethos* is consummated in the complex interaction between Man and Holy Spirit: anthropology and the science of the spiritual stamp their theological-political pact in the Incarnation of the Messiah, while the intellect remains under the rule of dogma: "since the spirit appeared in the world, since 'the Word became flesh' (*das Wort Fleisch geworden*), since then the world has been spiritualized (*vergeistigt*), enchanted (*verzaubert*), it is a specter (*ein Spuk*)."<sup>20</sup> However, the basic equation had already been set up by the ancient Greeks when they identified thinking and spirit (thinking and the immaterial eidetic): "what are your thoughts? Spiritual entities (*Geistige Wesen*)."<sup>21</sup>

In fact, Christian spectrophilia is the foundation of the ontological argument that is part of every believer's horizon. In this way, writes Stirner,

Instead of saying, 'I am *more* than spirit (*Geist*)', you say with contrition, 'I am *less* than spirit (*Geist*); and spirit, pure spirit (*reinen Geist*), or the spirit that is nothing but spirit, I can only think of, but am not; and, since I am not it, it is another, exists as another, whom I call 'God.'<sup>22</sup>

God, being necessarily found outside of Man, is the hypostasis that the latter constructs so as to give himself to

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 49 (36).

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 45 (33).

a supreme specter that, in turn, presents itself to the faithful in the form of Holy Spirit.

In the Stirnerian view, the antichristianity of the moderns is an inevitable consequence of the spectrification of the world: “the newest revolts against God are nothing but the extremest efforts of ‘theology’, that is, theological insurrections (*theologische Insurrektionen*).”<sup>23</sup> That is why, for Stirner, the great modern revolutions bear the mark of their originary messianism,<sup>24</sup>—but, far from being a virtue, this subtracts any value from the supposedly new freedoms that they bring. Finally, Christians and antichristians share a common enemy, the one who will appear only in humanity’s adulthood: “Despite all your atheism, in zeal against *egoism* (*Egoismus*) you concur with the believers in immortality (*mit dem Unsterblichkeitsgläubigen*).”<sup>25</sup> Christians and liberals form a common front in the desperate attempt to fight and delay the emergence of the Unique.

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23 *Ibid.*, 42 (30).

24 It should be noted that, in the analysis of the process of transformation of sacred into secularized history, Stirner relied on the precedent of another Hegelian, the leader of the Tübingen theological school, Ferdinand Baur. See *Die christliche Gnosis*. Stirner anticipated the main thesis of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele*, and Jacob Taubes’ *Abendländische Eschatologie*. Stirner’s case is omitted by Karl Löwith in the work he composed on this issue: *Weltgeschichte und Heilgeschehen: Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie*.

25 Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 44 (32).

This is how the Incarnation is repeated in the historical-ontological possibility of modern secular humanism:

The *corporeal* or embodied spirit is just man (*der leibhaftige oder beleibte Geist ist eben der Mensch*); [...] Henceforth man no longer, in typical cases, shudders at ghosts *outside* him, but at himself (*Gespensstern außer ihm*); he is terrified at himself.<sup>26</sup>

This postulate, which makes anthropology a form of theology and vice versa, had already been foreseen by another young Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach, who wrote:

the essence of Man, which distinguishes him from the animal, is not only the foundation (*Grund*), it is also the object (*Gegenstand*) of religion. Religion is [...] the consciousness which man has of his own—not finite and limited, but infinite essence (*nicht endlichen, beschränkten, sondern unendlichen Wesen*).<sup>27</sup>

On this point Stirner carries out a radicalization of the consequences of Feuerbach's Hegelianism, since, for the former, if God is a specter, then the Man who replaces him as infinite essence is as spectral as any hypostasized supreme Being, and probably much more frightening. In this way, Stirner makes Feuerbach into another link in the anthro-spectro-logical chain inherent to all forms of Christian theology.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 54 (41).

<sup>27</sup> Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 36; *The Essence of Christianity*, 2. [Translation slightly modified to accord with Ludueña's Spanish —T.N.]

Modern times are also the age of Man, as renewed ruling specter who makes the essential “general human condition” the rod with which, from here on, metaphysics, law, and politics are to be measured. There is a specter in each body: Man (which is just the extreme consequence of the Incarnation of the Christological phantasm)<sup>28</sup>; this renders the edifice of modern law not only a seat of “juridical fictions” but also, and above all, a theurgy endlessly engaged in invoking specters and negotiating with them. In this way, shamanism is replaced by juridical science, as the privileged guardian of the new community of human specters born in the French Revolution. Seen from the Stirnerian perspective, far from being “positive sciences”, law and politics are technologies of the phantasmagoric, staging a phantomachy around Man as the supreme being of a new socio-political order.

Christ is the first humanist in a movement through which Antiquity worshipped the people (*demos*); therefore there was not yet space for a complete Man (it was rendered impossible by the existence of slavery). However, Christianity, as the rebellion of the slaves, resulted in a vindication of the anthropological condition of Man (even if he is “fallen”) and bourgeois society carried this movement to the point of paroxysm, consecrating juridically him in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*

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28 On this question I refer the reader to my *La comunidad de los espectros I. Antropotecnia*, 93-138.

(1789): “piety and morality part company in this—that the former makes God the lawgiver (*Gesetzgeber*), the second Man.”<sup>29</sup>

Stirner is one of the most ferocious post-Hegelian critics of the rationality of human rights:

How often the sacredness of the inalienable rights of man (*Menschenrechte*) has been held up to their foes, and some liberty or other shown and demonstrated to be a ‘sacred right of man’ (*heiliges Menschenrecht*)! Those who do that deserve to be laughed out of court.<sup>30</sup>

As Stirner acutely observes, well before so many contemporary critics, the logic borne by so-called human rights implies that, from their declaration on, law formally establishes an inextricable relationship between itself and life in the name of the specter of “man in general”, which itself implies a decisive transformation of the positivity of law. From then on, “one must carry *in oneself*, the law, the statute, and whoever is most animated by the law, is the most moral.”<sup>31</sup> Everybody contains, as Stirner indicates, an anthropomorphic ghost; but now, also, every man is the *revenant* of a norm that, as it becomes diffuse, eventually becomes fused with the management of the living.

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29 Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 62 (49).

30 *Ibid.*, 66 (53).

31 *Ibid.*, 63 (50): “man soll das Gesetz, die Satzungen sich tragen, und wer am gesetzlichsten gesinnt ist, der ist der Sittlichste”.

This is why, before the specters, Stirner's responds by adopting the attitude of a veritable exorcist. The philosopher is the sworn enemy of the ghosts that populate Western politics and, for that same reason, of any ontotheology, which, in the last instance, can only be based on the various declinations of the spectrality of concepts and supersensible entities. As Marx points out, Stirner thinks it is possible and desirable to destroy spectral "powers" (*Mächte*) "by removing the false opinion (*falsche Meinung*) of them from his head."<sup>32</sup> Taking, for example, the figure of the Emperor,

With the disappearance of the *spectral* corporeality (*die gespenstige Leibhaftigkeit*) of the Emperor, what disappears for him is not the corporeality, but the *spectrality* of the Emperor (*die Gespensterhaftigkeit des Kaisers*), the actual power of whom he can now at last appreciate in all its scope.<sup>33</sup>

In some letters to Marx, who would come to severely admonish his friend on the matter, Engels showed some initial sympathies towards Stirner; for his part, Marx was definitely Stirner's most conspicuous philosophical enemy. Symmetrically, Stirner will be one of the greatest demolishers of Marxist philosophy.

That is why Marx's preferred strategy is the well-known and customary absolute destruction of his opponent. The

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32 Marx and Engels, *Die deutsche Ideologie*, 109; *The German Ideology*, 137.

33 *Idem*.

sole objective of his writing on Stirner is to throw him into the mire alongside all those expelled from the pantheon of acceptable thinkers, sentencing him to a forgetting without mercy. To carry this out, Marx had no alternative but to systematically deform Stirner's philosophy, glossing every line in the book so as to deflect the original meanings and invert the original statements. Once in a while, Marx's wit hits the target with a precise interpretation; most of the time, he only ends up writing like an implacable inquisitor, an obsessive of falsified refutation with the sole objective of hiding, to whatever degree possible, everything that Marxism might share (and also owe) to Stirner's radicality.

We can't stop here to engage in a detailed reading of the deformations through which Marx puts Stirner (though they are quite revelatory of Marx's exegetical and political practices), but it is important to point out that the entire structure of the invective is constructed precisely in the form of a re-theologization of Stirner (Marx calls him "Saint Max"). Though Stirner attempted to construct a completely *a-theological* history, Marx attempts to re-enclose Stirner in the confines of "Ecclesiastical History" (*Kirchengeschichte*) and to make of *The Unique and its Property* a "Holy Book" (*das Heilige Buch*)<sup>34</sup> that must be expunged and fought with all the rigors of critique.

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34 *Ibid.*, 101; 128.

However, the two enemies share a common goal, and their apparently irreconcilable positions should not deceive us on this matter: they are both consummate exorcists of historical spirits, insofar as they desire the abolition of some of the essential specters, such as God, the bourgeois State, or the citizen. However, Marx very much wants one ghost to survive: “the specter of communism” (*das Gespenst des Kommunismus*),<sup>35</sup> and Stirner was especially determined to conjure it away.

Stirner’s opposition to every spectral ontology leads him to maintain that:

Man has not really vanquished (*überwunden*) Shamanism and its specters (*das Schamanentum und seinen Spuk*) until he possesses the strength to lay aside not only the belief in ghosts or in spirits (*Gespensterglauben*), but also the belief in the spirit (*Geistesglauben*).<sup>36</sup>

In other words, only a complete destruction of metaphysics—refuge par excellence of Spirit (*Geist*) as specter (*Gepenst*)—can be a true practice of exorcism in the splendorous final act of a history of philosophy crowned by the monument of the Hegelian system and its disciples, who celebrate the appearance of Man as “the most oppressive ghost.”<sup>37</sup>

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35 Marx and Engels, *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*, 461; *Communist Manifesto*, 218. The key work on the question of this specter is, of course, Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*.

36 Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, 81 (66).

37 *Ibid.*, 84 (69): “Der beklemmendste Spuk ist der Mensch”.



Seen from the millenarian development of onto-theology, which ends in Stirner as the true “last philosopher” of Western metaphysics, one might think that his work is in some way the sign, not so much of a return to the Presocratic sages (as might be concluded from a certain Heideggerian reading of the history of philosophy),<sup>38</sup> but more of a return to the time when, at a distance from the world of the ancient masters of truth, the Sophists imposed a vision of the world from which philosophical thought—in a conflictive mode—emerged. The name of Protagoras resounds as an echo that, from the depths of time, seems to announce the name of Stirner in the future. That is what his famous fragment seems to point out:

Man (*anthropos*) is the measure of all things (*chrematōn*), of the things that are (*ton onton*), that they are, and of the things that are not (*ton ouk onton*), that they are not (DK 80 B1).

Now, among the countless problems that this fragment has provoked across the centuries of its interpretations (which continue to appear today), not the least important is to understand the precise sense of the expression *chremata* (literally “useful things” and not just “things” in the

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38 Heidegger, ALETHEIA (Heraklit, Fragment 16)”; “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment 16)”.

ontic sense). In fact, it was Hannah Arendt who offered an interpretation of *chremata* as “objects at hand” that can serve the user, and has made possible, in this sense, a political understanding of the fragment:

since it is in the nature of man the user and instrumentalizer to look upon everything as means to an end [...] this must eventually mean that man becomes the measure not only of things whose existence depends upon him but of literally everything there is.<sup>39</sup>

Before Arendt, Eugène Dupréel had already defended a non-ontological interpretation of the fragment that, according to him, would represent a “sociological conventionalism.”<sup>40</sup> In all, there is no reason for the political and ontological interpretations to be opposed to each other. The entire problem lies in how to understand the ontological wager of the fragment. So translating *chremata* with *pragmata*, understanding them as *phainomena*, and, in the final instance, as *onta*, certainly implies that “phenomenologically deciding on being as presence”<sup>41</sup> brings a disagreement with it (at least partial, in terms of the possible relativism of the text) with the Platonic position on the particular in the *Theaetetus* 151e-152a, even if, conversely, one can understand the meaning of the fragment

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39 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 158.

40 Dupréel, *Les Sophistes. Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias*, 25.

41 Cassin, *L'effet sophistique*, 232.

as “a temporalized relation to the *logos*”<sup>42</sup> as uninterrupted creation.

In fact, the problem of the Heideggerian interpretation of the fragment is not so much an effect of its inclusion in a phenomenological framework as it is of Heidegger’s rejection of it as a full exposition of relativism. This classic vision, defended by Guthrie (subjectivism)<sup>43</sup> and Untersteiner (phenomenalism of the *sensa*)<sup>44</sup>, is nevertheless still likely to be the most plausible, even if it is possible to avoid a reading of the fragment that is forced to opt for a subjectivist vision as opposed to an objectivist one, by considering the things of the world and their evaluation as potentially variable in a continuous exchange.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, Heidegger thought that Descartes, like Protagoras, considered existents to possess a single truth, the essence of which is “evaluated and measured” (*ermessen und gemessen*) by the “ego”.<sup>46</sup> However, for Heidegger, truth in Protagoras means un-concealment of what is present, while it is only Descartes who would be the model of a Man who represents the world as measured by him and who is the object, as we have seen, of the primordial Stirnerian critique. However, the Heideggerian interpretation implies placing Protagoras in the Parmenidean line,

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42 *Ibid.*, 232.

43 Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 181sq.

44 Untersteiner, *I Sofisti*, 127sq.

45 Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos*, 130.

46 Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus*, 176.

while Porphyry had decisively identified the Protagorean doctrine as opposed to the Eleatic position.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore it is no longer so important to determine if the *anthropos* we are dealing with in this fragment is *this singular man* or an abstract universal, the archeological precursor to the modern subject. In any case, if we distance ourselves from Heidegger's Parmenidean reading, we will see a relativist ontology and politics emerge from Protagoras' fragment. Beyond the specific form we can give to each of these, the sophist forcefully expresses that it is Man who constitutes his ontological world independently of any absolute external truth.

But Stirner is not just the modern Protagoras. His philosophy does not imply a paradoxical return to Sophism; Protagoras' *anthropos* is not Stirner's egoist. The latter, on the contrary, when he claims to place the Unique "as measure and judge over all"<sup>48</sup>, not only makes the Protagorean tradition his own but overcomes and radicalizes it, since the *Unique* is no longer even *this Man*, but, from his corporeality, becomes the first *in-human* figure of Western post-metaphysics, and, in this sense, goes even farther than Heidegger's *Dasein* (which nevertheless also has a debt to Stirner) since, in the substanceless unity and the improper property that Stirner proposes, there is no

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47 Porphyry's position may be seen in Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*, 10, 3, 25.

48 Stirner, *Der Einzige*, 162 (145): "Also euch nehmt ihr zum Maße und Richter über alles". [See also 311 —T.N.]

anthropological remainder that could claim a new access to Being.<sup>49</sup>

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49 Which is why Stirner's thought is quite far from the false problem of so-called "modern individualism". This mistaken interpretation of Stirner has been **recently** defended in Enrico Ferri's collection *Max Stirner e l'individualismo moderno*.

Stirner's philosophy of history clearly has as its foundation the concept of Modernity as a process of secularization (well in advance of the many posterior theories on this process). Secularization is "the transformation of all laymen into divines in place of the limited body of clergy."<sup>50</sup> Seen from this perspective, modern society has as its distinctive mark the extreme *hierarchization* of its morphology and functioning. But where does hierarchy find its ontological support? In Stirner's view, hierarchy is derived from *potestas spiritualis*, but, for precisely that reason, it finds its most favorable *locus* in the spiritualization of thought that began with Greek contemplative speculation: "*Hierarchy is dominion of thoughts, dominion of mind! [...] Thoughts are the sacred.*"<sup>51</sup> For Stirner, in the scale of the sacred, the thinker places himself much higher than the believer, of whom he is the secularized figure: "the thinker (*der Denkende*) has thousands of articles of faith (*Glaubenssätze*) while the believer is happy with less."<sup>52</sup>

If hierarchy inherits the Spirit's power, then, ever since some form of thought has existed, it has necessarily

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50 Stirner, *Der Einzige*, 89 (73): "*die Umwandlung aller Laien in Geistliche an Stelle des beschränkten Klerus*".

51 *Ibid.*, 84 (68): "*Hierarchie ist Gedankenherrschaft, Herrschaft des Geistes! [...] Gedanken sind das Heilige*".

52 *Ibid.*, 336 (303).

co-existed with hierarchy, which originates in the metaphysical distinction of a spiritual realm. Thus, thought's concepts are the chain links that one by one compose the hierarchical dominion of interior phantasms,<sup>53</sup> beginning with God as the Absolute: "God, who is spirit, alone lives. Nothing lives but the ghost."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, if hierarchy coincides with the sacralization of thought itself, then conscience becomes a "secret police state" (*Geheimen Polizeistaat*)<sup>55</sup> that inhabits every individual, and the doxology of sacred power becomes a *humanist doxology* of the rights of man.<sup>56</sup>

In Stirner's diagnosis of the modern world, all the French Revolution did was to become the operator of the secularization by which divine monarchy becomes humanist monarchy: "The revolution was not directed against *the established*, but against the *establishment in question*, against a *particular* establishment. It did away with *this* ruler, not with *the* ruler."<sup>57</sup> However, in Stirner's view,

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53 The most zealous adherent of this philosophical perspective was Oskar Panizza. See *Der Illusionismus und die Rettung der Persönlichkeit*.

54 *Ibid.*, 96 (79): "Gott, welcher Geist ist, lebt allein. Es lebt nichts als das Gespenst".

55 *Ibid.*, 98 (81).

56 *Ibid.*, 143 (98).

57 *Ibid.*, 118 (100): "Die Revolution war nicht gegen das Bestehende gerichtet, sondern gegen dieses Bestehende, gegen einen bestimmten Bestand. Sie schaffte diesen Herrscher ab, nicht den Herrscher".

the phantasmagoria of equal rights (a substitute for the theology of grace and merit) creates a democracy whose distinctive mark and, so to speak, ultimate essence is constituted, despite the opinions of liberals on the matter, by a permanent “state of exception”: “and what may be allowed under peaceable circumstances ceases to be permitted as soon as a state of exception (*Belagerungszustand*) is declared.”<sup>58</sup>

This is how the liberal State becomes a police State, as citizens are “criminalized”<sup>59</sup> until security becomes the dominant aspect of the “social question”. Thus “the State does not apply death against itself, but against an offensive member; it tears out an eye that offends it.”<sup>60</sup> This deep logic, affecting the constitutive foundations of modern politics, explains the apparent paradox pointed out by Michel Foucault: that everything he called biopolitics had its thanatological double.<sup>61</sup> However, what for Foucault was simply a double process originating in the historical contingency of the appearance of the “population state”,<sup>62</sup> is for Stirner the predictable result of an ontologico-epochal determination whose outlines were traced by

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58 *Ibid.*, 196 (177).

59 *Ibid.*, 197-203 (178-183).

60 *Ibid.*, 199 (180): “*Der Staat wendet den Tod ja nicht gegen sich an, sondern gegen ein ärgerliches Glied; er reißt ein Auge aus, das ihm ärgert.*”

61 Michel Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 191-198; *The History of Sexuality* vol. 1, 145-150.

62 Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*.



two millennia of phantasmatic sedimentation, and whose major points can only be elucidated by a *critical spectrography of historical times* that would overcome any standard conception of history as materialist chronology.

For this very reason, the modern era has radicalized its concern for the management of the living, becoming a truly “zoopolitical” era. The Christian God “gives life” and at the same time promises “life in eternity” (*Leben in Ewigkeit*).<sup>63</sup> With liberal secularization, on the other hand,

People now want nobody to be embarrassed for the most indispensable necessities of life, but want every one to feel secure (*gesichert*) as to these; and on the other hand they teach that man has this life to attend to and the real world (*in die wirkliche Welt*) to adapt himself to.<sup>64</sup>

The politics of the past, and the wager of all politics to come, meet up at the crossroads of life. For Stirner, the *egoist* has the mission of opposing the liberal order, not administering life but *enjoying it* until its exhaustion: “One uses life, and consequently himself the living *one*, in *consuming* it and *himself*. *Enjoyment of life is using life up*.”<sup>65</sup> The *use of life*, as opposed to the management of life, declares the future politics of the *Unique*, who today runs the risk

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63 Stirner, *Der Einzige*, 312 (283).

64 *Ibid.*, 313 (283).

65 *Ibid.*, 313 (283): “*Man nutzt das Leben und mithin sich, den Lebendigen, indem man es und sich verzehrt. Lebensgenuß ist Verbrauch des Lebens.*”

of having become the emblem of a good deal of contemporary political philosophy (seeming to have forgotten its genealogical roots in a post-Hegelianism of which it merely offers new spectral incarnations).

However, for Stirner, it is communism that perhaps represents the extreme figure of secularized Christianity (and such a diagnostic would no doubt have offended Marx's dialectical materialism). As Stirner himself points out: "We are still living entirely in the Christian age, and the very ones who feel worst about it are the most zealously contributing to 'complete' it."<sup>66</sup> The problem of private property, according to Stirner, cannot be simply resolved in the way proposed by communism. In the last instance, this solution implies the phantasmatic presence of a sort of State as an omnipotent remainder that resolves the transition to the socialization of means of production: "Property, therefore, should not and cannot be abolished; it must rather be torn from ghostly hands and become my property."<sup>67</sup>

Just as Stirner does not believe in the myth of "free competition" (*freie Konkurrenz*)<sup>68</sup> since, by definition,

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66 *Ibid.*, 307 (283): "Wir leben noch ganz im christlichen Zeitalter, und die sich daran am meisten ärgern, tragen gerade am eifrigsten dazu bei, es zu 'vollenden'."

67 *Ibid.*, 254 (320): "Also das Eigentum soll und kann nicht aufgehoben, es muß vielmehr gespenstischen Händen entrissen und mein Eigentum werden."

68 *Ibid.*, 256 (232).

“things actually do not belong to me but to the law”<sup>69</sup>, he also dismisses any sort of State expropriation or redistribution of private property: “the question of property [...] will only be resolved in the war of all against all.”<sup>70</sup> Which is to say that if there is an “end of history” (*Ziel der Geschichte*)<sup>71</sup>—Stirner, by the way, does not seem to have much confidence in this possibility—it will consist in the unappealable reign of endless war among the *egoists*. In this sense, the dissolution of the social bond proposed by Stirner can only be achieved by instigating, not a “permanent revolution”, but a veritable “permanent war” which, however, should not be confused with a Hobbesian return to a state of nature, since, for Stirner, “society is our state of nature” (*die Gesellschaft ist unser Naturzustand*).<sup>72</sup>

Which is how we get the great profanatory cry that Stirner offers, trying to silence the rule of specters over the egoists’ unicity:

But I give or take to myself the right out of my own plenitude of power [...] Owner and creator of my right, I recognize no other source of right than—me, neither God nor the state nor nature nor even man

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69 *Ibid.*, 270 (245): “Die Dinge gehören nun wirklich nicht mir, sondern der Rechte.”

70 *Ibid.*, 254 (230): “Genug die Eigentumsfrage läßt sich nicht so gütlich lösen, als die Sozialisten, ja selbst die Kommunisten träumen. Sie wird nur gelöst durch den Krieg aller gegen alle.”

71 *Ibid.*, 357 (323).

72 *Ibid.*, 299 (271).

himself with his 'eternal rights of man', neither divine nor human right.<sup>73</sup>

It is no coincidence that these words already contain *in nuce* the good news announced by the partisans of certain antinomian and apparently atheological positions, of a certain philosophy of the contemporary left. Stirner's inheritors are as numerous as his unrecognized legacy has been unnoticed and subterranean.

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73 *Ibid.*, 202 (183): "Ich aber gebe oder nehme mir das Recht aus eigener Machtvollkommenheit, und gegen jede Übermacht bin ich der unbußfertigste Verbrecher. Eigener und Schöpfer meines Rechts—erkenne ich keine andere Rechtsquelle als—mich, weder Gott, noch den Staat, noch die Natur, noch auch den Menschen selbst mit seinen »ewigen Menschenrechten«, weder göttliches noch menschliches Recht."

After the cataclysm of the Second World War, in the shadows of a devastated world (where he had been an active protagonist), Carl Schmitt delivered himself over to a grave reflection on his own intellectual history and on the meaning of universal history. These lucubrations, which occupied Schmitt's thoughts during the Nuremberg trials, are a fundamental testimony to the German jurist's ultimate convictions concerning philosophy and theology.

In April 1947, when, before what he saw as the titanic menace of the technologization of that world known, until then, as human, Schmitt decided to invoke the figure of Max Stirner. On one hand, in the jurist's words, Stirner is

abominable (*scheusslich*), crude (*lümmerhaft*), pretentious (*angeberisch*), presumptuous (*renommistisch*), a beginner (*ein Pennalist*), a waste of a student (*ein verkommener Studiker*), an imbecile (*ein Knote*), a crazy man on his own (*ein Ich-Verrückter*), clearly a profound psychopath (*offenbar ein schwerer Psychopath*).<sup>74</sup>

However, this typical florilegium of insults (as we've noted, Stirner was used to this from the moment he finished his magnum opus) shouldn't mislead us as to the secret importance he had in Schmitt's thought. In fact, the jurist learned of the philosopher's existence, according to

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74 Schmitt, *Ex captivitate Salus. Erfahrungen der Zeit 1945/47*, 80.

his own testimony, during his secondary education (*Max Stirner kenne ich seit Unterprima*)<sup>75</sup>, as early as 1902. Schmitt considered *The Unique and its Property* as the book with the loveliest title, or at least the most German title, of all German literature. Max's specter, says Schmitt, "is the only one to visit me in my cell."

Indeed, Schmitt counted on a few oracular authors to whom he would turn in crisis-moments of his thinking. Together they make up the jurist's "uranium mines of the history of spirit (*Uran-Bergwerke der Geistesgeschichte*)."<sup>76</sup> Among them figure the Presocratics, some Christian church fathers, and also some writings of the pre-1848 era: "poor Max was absolutely part of the group (*der arme Max gehört durchaus dazu*)."<sup>77</sup> In fact, Schmitt was acutely aware of a truth that seems to have been forgotten by a good deal of contemporary political philosophy, that "what is exploding today was prepared before 1848; the fire that burns today was lit back then (*das Feuer, das heute brennt, wurde damals gelegt*)." Therefore, "one who knows well the course of European thinking from 1830 to 1848 (*des europäischen Gedankenganges von 1830 bis 1848*)" is prepared to confront the events that unfold at the planetary scale in contemporary politics.

Stirner initiated Schmitt into this truly esoteric torrent of thinking of the "Free", the young left Hegelians who met

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75 *Idem.*

76 *Idem.*

77 *Idem.*

in a legendary tavern in Weinstube. Beyond the mixture of fascination and horror that his political ideas produced in Schmitt, the jurist came, suggestively, to admire in Stirner “the desperation (*Verzweiflung*) of a struggle against vertigo (*mit dem Schwindel*) and the ghosts of his time (*den Gespenstern seiner Zeit*).”<sup>78</sup>

The question was precisely that of specters. European history, after the great abandonment of Hegelian Spirit, could not get rid of its besieging phantasms. The Stirnerian hurricane attempted to exorcise away the spirits that, in his eyes, were something merely illusory or simply alienating. Schmitt, on the other hand, thought he could control those same phantasms with a political theology that he hoped to embody, as the last exponent of the *jus publicum europaeum*. Stirner appeared as an exorcist, whereas Schmitt wanted to be the jurist-theologian who could recover the remaining strength of the moribund specters of the historical lineage of European destiny.

The aporias that they both faced make up the very ground of our present. This is why the cipher of contemporary politics is still the *mystery of the specter*. None of the “Free” (Stirner first and foremost) could ever grasp the nature of that spectrality they wished to eliminate at any cost, and Schmitt was the privileged heir (though politically opposed) of that opposition to the ontological understanding of the ghost. Can we, today, given the agonizing

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78 Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 48.

state of our situation, continue to deny the urgency of a true non-Hegelian *spectrology* as a metaphysical-political science of the ghostly? Can spirits recover some sort of voice after the Stirnerian phantasmicide?





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## TRANSLATOR'S REMARKS

1. I have used the 1995 Cambridge edition of Byington's translation of Stirner, *The Ego and its Own*, modifying it where necessary to accord with Ludueña's Spanish, which is itself in some places a modified version of José Rafael Hernández Arias' 2004 Spanish translation. In the footnotes, the first page number refers to the German, the second, in parentheses, to the Cambridge edition. I have also followed my own inclinations in employing a more exact rendering of the title, *The Unique and its Property*, in the article's main body.
2. I have retained the "gendered universal" *Man/man* where it is a question of philosophical humanism, since it is precisely the possibility of the initial and continued metaphysical projection of this universal that is at stake here, which is not to say that a similarly universal Woman or apparently gender-neutral Human could not be projected using the same apparatus.
3. Where Ludueña uses the Spanish *fantasma* and its adjectival form *fantasmal*, I have employed *ghosts*, *ghostly* or *phantasm*, *phantasmal* interchangeably. I have purposely discarded *spook*, which, however effective it may have been in Byington's time, has not aged well, and seems more silly than haunting in the contemporary Anglophone world.





**Also in English by Fabián Ludueña:**

*H.P. Lovecraft: The Disjunction in Being*  
(Schism Books, 2014)

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